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OR,
THE INDIAN GIRL'S VICTIM.

By DUKE CUYLER.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW ON THE RIVER.

"Here the trail runs into the water. What can have become of them, Luke?"

The speaker was a young man of perhaps five-and-twenty. Of medium height and a well-knit frame, with a frank, open expression upon his countenance, he was one that would attract the attention of a stranger, and affect him favorably.

HURLED TO A TERRIBLE DEATH IN THE FEARFUL CHASM, RUTH FELT HERSELF GOING DOWN, DOWN—WHEN SUDDENLY A STRONG ARM WAS THROWN BENEATH HER, AND SHE WAS BROUGHT BACK TO THE SOLID ROCK.

His garb was that worn by many backwoodsmen of his day. It consisted of a complete suit of buckskin, evidently of Indian make, as it was ornamented by many fanciful devices. In his right hand he carried the usual long rifle of the day, the shining barrel of which was without a speck of rust, showing that he bestowed much care and attention upon it, so that it might not fail him when perhaps his very life might depend upon its doing him faithful service.

In his belt, which was buckled tightly about him, were thrust his hunting-knife and a brace of pistols, so that if even his faithful rifle became for the moment unserviceable, he still had weapons with which he could defend himself.

A look of eager anxiety was on his face, and his eyes, which had rested upon the earth until he had reached the bank of the river, were now cast quickly up and down the stream, as though they were in search of something of which they had lost the trace.

Such in looks and appearance was Harry Libby, the young hunter, at the moment when we introduce him to the notice of the reader.

His companion, to whom his words were addressed, came close behind him, and so noticeable was his appearance that it will warrant a description.

His age was somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty, although he looked much younger.

His heavy beard and hair were threaded here and there with silver, but his countenance was still fresh. His form, which reached an altitude of six feet and a half, was as straight as an arrow. His garments were similar to those of his companion, although they showed far more the wear and tear of forest life to which they had been subjected.

Across his shoulder was flung a rifle almost as long as himself. A huge hunting-knife was thrust into his belt, to which was also suspended his powder-horn and bullet-pouch.

His form, tall as it was, did not seem at all out of proportion, for his shoulders were broad, and the huge sinews of his limbs indicated great strength. There did not seem to be a pound of surplus flesh upon his entire frame.

Such in appearance was Luke Hawkins, the scout, who was reckoned all through the Miami country as the bravest borderman that trod the pathless wilds of the forest. He was known among the settlers as the Forest King, a name not ill-deserved.

The savages, so inveterate an enemy was he to them, and so many of them had he slain, called him the Death-Shadow.

The time was afternoon. The sun was some two hours above the tree-tops, where it hung like a huge ball of fire in the unclouded summer sky. The place was the western bank of the Miami, some three miles from the verge of the nearest settlement.

Since noon Luke and his companion had been following on a trail which they had struck in the forest while on a hunting expedition which they had set out on two days before from the settlement in which Harry resided.

Of late Luke had found little to do. The savages had been very quiet, and no outrage on their part had been reported. Therefore he had invited his young friend to a hunt with him, and they were on their homeward way again when they had struck the trail of which we have made mention, and from the inspection of which they judged some new outrage against the settlers had been perpetrated by the redskins.

Intermingled with the foot-prints of a couple of savages were those of another, which they had no difficulty in deciding, from the size, and being made by a shoe, were made by a woman, and a white one.

They were small, and it was evident that the woman was of slight build. No sooner had they set their eyes upon the trail than they knew that some one of their own race had been so unfortunate as to fall into the hands of the savages.

This was enough for them to know. They saw their duty, and at once resolved to perform it. A fear, which he had not as yet given expression to in words, oppressed the heart of Harry as he looked upon the imprint the little foot had made.

Ruth Lee, his own betrothed wife, lived in the settlement from which the footsteps seemed to come, and he was fearful that it was she who had fallen into the hands of the redskins.

Taught by Luke, he knew something of woodcraft, and he could follow a trail passing well; but it took the scout's accustomed eye to determine the freshness of a trail.

Carefully Luke had scrutinized the one before them, and had read there easier, perhaps, than he could read the page of a book, the time that had passed since the savages, with their captive, had gone that way.

He was as firmly convinced in his own mind that it had been since noon as he was that they were now standing gazing down upon it.

But one thought or determination animated the mind of each, and this was to follow on the trail, rescue the captive, and punish her captors, if possible.

This they had undertaken at once, and the trail had brought them to the river, where the exclamation which we have recorded fell from the lips of Harry, who at this point chanced to be in the advance.

Luke stepped past his companion and went down to the water's edge.

Hidden from observation of any who might be afloat upon the water by the thick bushes on either side, he gave a quick glance up and down the stream. But there was no object to be seen on its unruffled bosom. The water lay as untroubled as the smooth face of a mirror.

"Strange," he muttered, half to himself and half in answer to the query Harry had made. "I don't see how the varmints got across, if across they went. Let me see if they ain't like musk-rats, and have hid their trail in the bank."

"I don't see how that can be," said Harry. "Here it is as plain as anything can be, leading down to the water's edge, and for the life of me I can see no sign where it turns up or down the bank."

"Well, thar's one thing sartin, they never swam across the stream with their captive. It would be a hard job to do if she was minded to go, as of course she wasn't. They either had a chance canoe hid hereabouts which took them over, or else they've gone up or down the stream. Which it is, for the life of me I can't find out, but I will afore I leave this spot. I would give something if I could tell now who it is they've got into their clutches."

"Do you know that I'm afraid it is Ruth Lee," said Harry, in a tone which told of the fear which was in his heart.

"What? not little Ruth—that gal of your'n?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because this foot-print here looks so much like hers."

"That ain't no reason. Gals leave their marks pretty much alike behind 'em. But some of 'em, I suppose, have got bigger feet than others. This one here ain't hardly bigger than a child's."

"Ruth's isn't, and that's what makes me think that it is her. But I hope I'm mistaken. If harm should come to her it would kill her mother. You know that the redskins took her father's life last year."

"Yes, and they paid dearly for it, too. A good half-dozen of 'em went under for doing that job."

"Yes, Luke, I know he was avenged; but that didn't bring him back to life. But do you know that I have often thought that the most guilty one of all escaped."

"No."

"But I am almost sure of it."

"Who was it?"

"The renegade who has joined his fortunes with the savages—he whom we know by the name of Justin Litch."

"Don't you think that is his real name?"

"No. The Lees are sure that it is not."

"What do they think it is?"

"Before they came West Robert Lee had an enemy, who swore that he would be their ruin. This he effected so far as their property was concerned, and then, to escape the penalty of his crime, he fled, and was seen no more. He was supposed to have gone West, but it was never known to a certainty. To mend their fortunes the Lees came here, and shortly afterward, as you know, the husband

and father was slain. Since then the mother and daughter have become convinced, from the description they have had of the renegade, Justin Litch, that it is their old enemy, Hiram Bailey. If this be so, and Ruth is indeed in the hands of the redskins, as I fear, I have no doubt but that the renegade is at the bottom of it."

"Well, it may be so; but I hope you are mistaken, and that the gal is safe; but if it proves to be so, we've got a work before us that we won't give up until we've made the villain smart for his deviltry. I've had my eyes on the scamp for some time, for I knew his being with the redskins wa'nt for no good. If I can only bring my rifle to bear on him once more, I'll settle his score for him. But now to find the trail ag'in, if we can, which the varmints have hid in the water."

While this conversation had been going on they had both stood close to the water's edge, where the trail had apparently ended. The water at this point was shoal close to the bank, being not more than a couple of feet in depth, and so clear that the sandy bottom could be seen without difficulty.

Carefully Luke scrutinized the sand at the bottom for a minute, and then slowly moved down the stream with his eyes fixed upon the water.

Harry followed in his footsteps, and for a little time they went on without making any discovery, or a word passing between them.

Suddenly Luke uttered an exclamation which told his companion that he had struck upon the clew they were searching for.

"What is it? What have you found?" demanded Harry, eagerly.

The scout pointed down into the water.

"Look, and tell me what you see there," he said, in a triumphant tone.

"I don't see anything," answered Harry, after he had closely scrutinized the spot toward which the scout pointed.

"What have you got eyes for, if it ain't to use 'em?" exclaimed the scout. "I'm afraid, Harry, that you ain't got your learning yet."

"I confess to that, and also that I can see nothing there."

"Don't you see any marks on the sand under the water?"

"No. All I can see is a spot here and there where the water has been a little riled, and where now it has settled down again."

"And what more do you want? They have waded along here, stepping carefully in each other's tracks, so as to make as little disturbance on the bottom as possible, and hoping that the water would hide that little. But Luke Hawkins has been too long in this line of business to be fooled by any such a plan as this. Fording here can't be done unless a feller has legs as long as the trunks of these 'ere trees. I know'd that the varmints hadn't gone across unless they had a canoe in this place—which I didn't believe they had. All we've got to do now is to foller down the bank, and we'll soon find where the trail has took to the land again."

Keeping close to the water's edge, they passed down the bank, with their eyes fixed upon the signs they saw in the bottom. For perhaps twenty rods they kept on in this way, and then, at a point where the current of the river set in toward the shore, they saw abundant signs of where the savages had been forced ashore owing to the depth of the water.

"I told you so," said Luke, triumphantly. "They thought they would fool somebody by this maneuver. Now we have the trail plain enough, and all we've got to do is to go on."

"You can read them better than I can," said Harry. "There is a good deal that you can teach me in wood-craft yet."

"I suppose I can, youngster. A man can't get his larnin' in a minute. It has cost me a good deal of time and patience. But look here! See what you've gone by. Like as not it will give us a clew as to who the gal is they carried off."

He held up, as he spoke, a bit of cloth, which, having caught upon a dry stick, had apparently been torn from the dress of the wearer. Harry turned as pale as death.

"It is a piece of Ruth's dress!" he said. "I felt from the first that it was her that the redskins were carrying off."

CHAPTER II.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL.

Harry took the bit of cloth from the scout's hand, and gazed earnestly upon it. It was undoubtedly torn from the dress Ruth Lee had worn the last time he had seen her, only two days before, and he was as firmly convinced that his fears as to the identity of the captive had proved true as he would have been had he seen her in the hands of the savages.

For the space of a minute he stood thus gazing in silence upon it, and then he placed it in his pocket as carefully as if it were some cherished memento he wished to preserve.

"Then you are sure that it is little Ruth?" said the scout, who had been watching his face and his movements with much interest.

"As sure as I am that we are standing here."

"Wal, I'm mighty sorry that your gal has got into trouble, Harry; and, for your sake, I wish that it had been somebody else, though, after all, it would have been jest as bad. But don't look so down-hearted about it—we've got the trail now, and if we don't find her, I'm greatly mistaken. They ain't got a great ways the start of us, and, if we only had a little more daylight, we would come up with them afore a great while. There ain't no moon, and, from the looks of the sky, I'm afraid that it will be pesky dark when night comes. But do you really think that Justin Litch has had a hand in this business?"

"I am sure of it."

"If he has he shall pay dear for it. I've not caught him up to any bloody work yet; but a man don't stay among the redskins for nothing. He soon gets to be as bad as they are, if he wasn't wus when he quartered with 'em. If he has a hand in this work against the Lees, he shall pay dearly for it. But there's one thing I'm pretty sure of. He ain't gone along this trail. There's no foot-prints 'cept the redskins' here, unless it is the gal's."

"He wouldn't dare to venture so near the settlement in daylight, for fear that he would be recognized by some one who knew him of old. But something seems to tell me that this is his work, and that he himself is not far away."

"I hope he is not; I want nothing better than to set eyes on him, and to find that he is mixed up in this matter. It would do me more good to send a bullet through him than it would to kill a dozen redskins."

"But we shall not find him if we stay here," said Harry, impatiently. "Let us follow on the trail as fast as we can."

Here the conversation ceased, and throwing his rifle over his shoulder, Luke strode along the trail, with Harry close upon his heels.

It lay plain before them, following down the bank of the river.

Slowly the sun sank downward as the scout and his young friend hurried forward on their errand of mercy and vengeance.

At last the sun reached the tree-tops, and slowly the golden light died out from the forest, and the shadows of evening at once began to fill the nooks and hollows with their dusky forms.

A little longer, and night would be down, and then to follow the trail would be impossible, for there was no moon to partly illuminate the forest aisles.

The stars, too, would hardly be able to give out their pale light, for the sky, as the sun went down, began to grow overcast away to the south and east.

This Luke and his companion knew well, and thus it was that they had made the haste along the trail that they had.

They were hoping to come up with the savages, or somewhere in their vicinity, before the darkness should hide the trail and so render it incapable of being followed.

Fainter and fainter grew the light in the forest, and at last even the experienced eye of Luke Hawkins could not discern the foot-prints of the savages.

Convinced at last that it was uncertain whether they were on the trail or not, the scout abruptly came to a stop.

"What is it? Have you seen anything?" demanded Harry, eagerly.

Luke replied in the negative.

"Why do you stop, then?" he asked, impatiently.

"Because I've lost the trail."

"That is unfortunate, but I do not wonder at it. I can hardly see how you have kept it for the last twenty minutes. No one, unless he had eyes like an owl, could hope to keep on it, in this darkness."

"You are right there, youngster. It is getting so dark that a feller can nigh about cut it with a knife."

"What can we do now?"

"There ain't but one way that I know, and that is to keep on down the river and trust to luck to take us right. But the chances of our finding 'em are ag'in us, I'll allow. If they stop and don't kindle a camp-fire we may stumble upon 'em afore we know it, and so run into a difficulty. They won't be apt to light a fire if they have any idea that they're followed. Then it may be that they'll cross the river somewhere hereabouts; and if they do, we shall miss 'em."

"But they can't ford across anywhere along here, if I remember aright."

"No; but they may have a canoe hidden along here somewhere. I know that they keep them on the river, and they may have used one to-day if they came over from the village, as most likely they did. If we could have had another hour of daylight it would have been all I would have asked for."

"What can we do? I can never bear to lay over here until morning. By that time they may have got such a start that all our efforts to find them will be useless."

"We ain't got but one way to do, and that is to go on and take the chances, which, I'll allow, are ag'in us. We'll keep close by the river, with our eyes and ears open. It may be that luck will help us to get a clew to 'em."

"There don't seem to be any other way," said Harry, after a moment's thought. "But let us go on and do what we can."

Luke moved on again, and they pursued their darksome way through the forest.

Their pace was faster now, for they made no effort to keep the trail.

The river was their guide, as thus far the savages had followed its general course.

Still they were far from certain that they were going right. The redskins might have turned from the river, or they might have crossed it.

They were going on uncertainties now, and every step might be carrying them farther from those of whom they were in pursuit.

For an hour they went on in this way, and then Luke paused again.

"Confound the luck!" he muttered, to himself. "This going without a clew I despise. I'm afraid, youngster, that we shall have to lay by until morning. The clouds are growing thicker every minute, and it is all that I can do to feel my way along. Then we ain't sure but what we're going away from 'em instead of following arter, as we ought to."

"I have been thinking of that all the time," said Harry, despondingly. "We've lost all trace of them, and I see no chance of finding it again—not until morning, at least, and by that time it may rain, and so wash out all signs of the trail. I fear that there is little chance of rescuing Ruth for a long time to come, even if it can ever be accomplished."

"It ain't no use to think so, my boy. We've got to keep up a good heart and work like beavers when we've got a job to do. I'll give in that things do look kinder discouraging jest now; but then they say it's always the darkest jest afore the dawn. But if it is any darker than it is now we shall have to trust wholly to feeling, for we shan't be able to see an inch afore our face."

"What do you think we had better do?"

Luke made no answer, and Harry again repeated his question.

"Hush!" came in a warning tone from the lips of the scout, and then the two men remained standing as mute as death.

Harry strained both eyes and ears to catch, if he could, the reason of the scout's exclamation.

But he neither saw nor heard anything.

For the space of a minute neither moved a limb, and then Harry asked, in a whisper:

"What is it, Luke? Have you seen anything?"

"No, but I heard something," the scout answered, in the same tone.

"What was it?"

"A footstep close beside us. There are redskins hereabouts, I'm sartin."

"Do you think they have got a trace of us?"

"There is no reason why they shouldn't. If they've got ears they couldn't help hearing us tramping along."

For the space of another minute they were mute and motionless.

"Don't stir from yer tracks, boy," said the scout, in the same whispered tone. "I'm going to take a look around here for a few minutes, though it is precious little that I shall see, I guess. Feeling around would be the better name for it. If there are redskins on our track I want to see what they are up to."

"Why not let me go with you?"

"Because you ain't so used to this business as I am. Keep quiet here until I come back. If you hear any sound near you look out for danger."

"But how will you find this spot again in the dark?"

"If you hear the hoot of an owl, jest you answer it, although not very loud. That'll be all the sign I want to find the spot again."

The next moment the scout had glided away in the darkness, leaving Harry standing bolt upright and motionless in his tracks.

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSING MAN.

After parting with his companion, Luke Hawkins moved slowly away from the spot, his steps turned from the bank of the river. He had no definite point in his mind toward which he would turn his footsteps, but set forth at random.

His ears were on the alert to catch the slightest sound, but for the space of several minutes a hush like that of death pervaded the forest. It seemed as though all nature was asleep. For something like a hundred rods he went on in a direct course from the river, which brought him to the summit of a slight eminence.

Here he paused and gazed carefully around on either side; but he saw nothing save the blackness of the night, which shrouded everything like a pall.

Turning to the right, he went on again for a few paces, and then suddenly paused.

His eye had suddenly caught a glimpse of an object he had been seeking for.

A pale light flickered away before him in the forest.

For a moment it would shine brightly, and then appear to flicker and die out, only to flash up again in a little time.

At first the thought had occurred to him that it might be only a will-o'-the-wisp dancing over a marshy place in the forest, but a little closer observation told him that it was stationary.

He was assured now that it shone out from a small camp-fire, and a feeling of satisfaction and triumph filled his breast.

Gathered about the fire, he had no doubt, were the captors of Ruth Lee, and she among them.

He wondered that they should have encamped with their captive without putting the river between them and those who might be following in pursuit; but it might be that she had become fatigued, and could go no farther that night.

For a moment he hesitated as to what was the best course for him to pursue.

Should he go back for Harry, or proceed alone to acquaint himself with what was going on about the camp-fire?

He was inclined to the latter, but a second thought decided him otherwise.

He knew that Harry would be impatiently awaiting his return, and that every minute would seem an age to him, and besides that he might be in danger.

He was sure that one redskin, at least, had been near

the spot, and others might be lurking round. Unmindful of his situation, in his anxiety, Harry might make some sound that would draw them to the spot, and so fall an easy prey into their hands.

Convinced now that he should return for Harry before approaching the camp-fire, the scout turned his steps as near as he could in the direction of the spot where they had parted.

One less used to the forest than he was would have gone wide of the spot in the darkness, but he had been placed too often in a like position to go far astray.

Hurriedly but noiselessly he went on, and in a few minutes' time felt convinced that he was approaching the spot where he had left his companion.

Not knowing but what he might pass him by, or that in the darkness Harry would mistake him for a savage, and give him the contents of his rifle, he paused and gave utterance to the signal which had been agreed upon between them.

The most experienced woodsman would have sworn that it was the hoot of an owl that woke the echoes of the forest, so near was the imitation to the cry uttered by that bird. Over and over again was it echoed by wood and river, and then died away in the far distance. Moment after moment went by, and still the answering signal did not come.

A silence, if possible, more profound than before, reigned around. A silence so great that it could almost be felt.

What could be the reason of Harry's silence? Surely he must have heard it; for, according to his calculations, the spot where he had left him standing was not more than twenty yards away. Could it be possible that harm had come to his friend during the few moments he had been absent?

He hardly knew what else to think.

Again he uttered the signal, and once more the echoes took it up and repeated it over and over again, but the answering sign for which he waited came not.

"What in nater can it mean?" he muttered to himself. "Surely something has happened to the boy. I'm sorry I left him behind. If the redskins have sent him under, I shall never forgive myself. But it may be that he didn't understand that he was to answer. At any rate, I'll hold on here, and give him a chance to come up. I'll give another hoot, so that he can't miss me, and I guess that'll bring him along all right."

Once more he sent forth the dismal hoot. One, two, five minutes passed, and there was no sign of the coming of Harry, nor no answering signal to show that he was alive.

Luke was now alarmed, and firmly convinced in his mind that something was wrong.

Harry had now more than double the time that was necessary for him to have reached the spot, had he been in a condition to have done so.

Thinking it useless to remain longer there, he was on the point of starting to try and find the spot where he had left him, when a slight sound near at hand arrested his attention.

He stood with his ears strained to listen for a repetition of the sound.

It came, and so close to him, that he was almost startled. It was a footstep light and wary.

At a second thought he did not know but that it might be Harry approaching, and he was just on the point of calling him by name, when the idea occurred to him that it might be a savage, and that it was better for him to remain silent.

It chanced that he was standing close to the trunk of a tree, and he knew that he had the advantage of whoever might be approaching.

He would not be perceived so readily in the darkness if he were standing alone.

Again the slight sound was repeated, this time closer than before.

Straining his eyes, he at last perceived the outlines of a human form creeping stealthily toward where he stood. Its outlines and motions told him that it was not his missing companion.

Harry would never approach the spot, after what had been agreed upon between them, in such a way as this.

A moment longer, and all suspense was ended. The shadowy form was unmistakably that of a savage.

Nearer and nearer he crept, until at last he was so close that Luke could see that he held his tomahawk in his hand, ready to deal his victim a blow the moment he should set eyes upon him. It was evident to the scout that as yet he had not been perceived.

This he saw at once gave him the advantage, and drawing his knife, he prepared to avail himself of it.

The savage was so close that by reaching out his arm he could almost touch him from where he stood.

The moment for him to act had come.

Holding his knife firmly in his right hand, he bounded upon him with a spring like that of a panther. With his left hand he caught the savage by the throat, and held him as in a vise.

In spite of all his wariness, the savage was taken completely by surprise, and the scout had him at his mercy. But mercy was not in the heart of Luke Hawkins.

With all the strength he could command, he sent the knife home to the heart of the savage, and the scout felt the warm blood gush out upon his hand.

That some harm had come to Harry, Luke was more strongly convinced than he had been before the advent of the late savage.

That the young man was either slain or a prisoner he had no doubt.

For a few moments he stood revolving in his mind what he had better do.

Should he turn back and endeavor to get a glimpse of what was going on about the camp-fire, or had he better seek still farther for Harry? He decided at length upon the latter.

He would at least try to find the spot where they had separated, and see what would be there disclosed. Perhaps there would be no need of seeking farther. Even now the young man's body might be lying there, fast growing cold in the embrace of death.

Decided in his mind upon this course, the scout directed his steps in that direction, and by something that seemed almost instinct they brought him to the exact spot.

He recognized it at once, despite the darkness, and half-dreading what he might find, he looked and felt about him. But no clew was to be found of him he sought.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER MYSTERY.

Completely mystified, the scout stood gazing about him in the darkness. In no way could he account for the disappearance of Harry.

He was positive that he was standing on the spot where he had left his companion only a short time before.

Why was it, then, that Harry was not here, or why had he not come to the spot where he had been waited for after the signal was repeatedly given? It must be that he had got into trouble after starting, in obedience to the first call.

Still, if this was the case, what had prevented him from giving an answer to the signal the first time it was given? Reason as he would, the scout could not find an answer that would satisfy him in his own mind. All was a mystery from beginning to end.

What should he do now?

He asked himself this question, and the space of a couple of minutes elapsed before he answered it.

To seek farther for Harry, until daylight came, he felt would be useless, unless some signal reached his ear, which would give him a clew and assure him that he was alive.

There seemed but one thing for him to do, and that was to go on in his search for Ruth.

If she were with her captors about the camp-fire, he must try and rescue her.

The light from the camp-fire was still visible, although not so bright as when he had last seen it.

Evidently it had been kindled for the purpose of preparing food, and they were now allowing it to go out.

Resolved to lose no more time in finding out who was about it, Luke bent his steps in that direction.

He knew that caution was necessary, for if Harry had fallen into the hands of the party, they would be on the lookout for others who might have borne him company in the search.

With noiseless steps he moved onward, pausing every now and then to catch any sound that might be made about him, but all was as silent as the tomb.

Nearer and nearer he approached the spot from whence the light proceeded.

Both ear and eye were on the alert for danger, which he knew well was hanging about the spot. The snapping of a twig or the rustle of a leaf he knew might bring the savages down upon him, and so ruin all.

His motions, therefore, were as light and noiseless as those of a shadow.

Closer and closer he came to the spot, and at last only a few yards intervened between him and it.

He could see the flames of the camp-fire as they rose and fell, throwing out a fitful glare, telling that they were fast expiring.

By this uncertain light he at last caught a glimpse of several figures sitting about the fire. He was too far away as yet to see whether the one he sought was among them or not. Evidently all was quiet there, and from this he thought they knew nothing of Harry. Whatever his fate had been, he felt sure that they knew nothing of it, or of the death of the savage who had fallen by his hand. If they had known it, they would not be taking things so quietly. With the utmost caution he approached, until less than a dozen yards intervened between him and the fire, and, as the light flashed up, he was enabled to see all who were gathered about it.

Only three savages met his gaze. If others were there, they were so far back in the shadows that the light did not reveal them.

There were no signs of Ruth.

Could it be, after all, that he was mistaken, and these were not her captors?

Surely it must be so, for where else could she be if not about the camp-fire.

Here was another disappointment and a mystery. What could have become of her? It must be that she was lying back somewhere in the shadows.

Straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of her, he ventured still nearer.

His rifle he held ready for instant use, in case it should be necessary.

Closer and still closer he ventured, until at length hardly a dozen feet lay between him and the nearest savage. Still they had no suspicion that their deadly enemy was so near.

As Luke stood there he was suddenly startled by a sound behind him.

For a few moments he listened intently, and then became convinced that footsteps were approaching the spot where he stood.

Close beside him, two trees, with their trunks joined closely together, afforded him a hiding-place, where, amid the shadows, he would not be easily discovered.

To change his position to this spot was but the work of a moment, and here he remained motionless, listening intently for the advent of those of whose coming his quick ear had given him warning.

A few moments made one thing manifest to him.

Whoever was approaching was doing so boldly, and therefore either belonged to the party or was sure of receiving a welcome there.

This told him, of course, that they were enemies of his, and that he should be on his guard against them.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps, and he was able to distinguish that there were at least two persons.

The redskins heard them now, and lifted up their heads and listened.

Then, as though there was something in the sound which was suspicious to them, they sprang to their feet, and laid their hands upon their weapons.

A moment more and two figures stepped into the circle of light thrown out by the camp-fire.

One was a huge, painted savage, and the other was a captive.

Luke gave a great start when his eyes fell upon the latter.

It was the very man whom for the last half-hour he had been seeking.

With a gag thrust into his mouth and his hands pinioned tightly behind him, Harry Libby was dragged by his captors into the midst of the exultant redskins, who in a series of pantomimes gave expression to the joy they felt at beholding this new victim.

Evidently they would have given an exultant whoop had it not been for a motion and a word given by the savage who had just arrived.

It told them that there were others near at hand, whose ears were on the alert for a sign of their whereabouts.

Luke was well versed in the Indian tongue, and was near enough to hear and understand all that was said.

He knew that the news the savage brought struck a fear to their hearts, for it told them that he whom they had named the Death-Shadow was upon their track.

Had they known that even then he was close upon them, that his hand could almost have reached them by stretching out, their fear would have been tenfold increased.

So many of their race had fallen by his hand, that his very name was a terror to them.

Holding his breath, the scout listened, that no word they uttered might escape him.

The burden of what the savage had to communicate was that their much-dreaded enemy was near by, seeking for him whom he had brought in a captive, and that if they would but go in search of him, they might slay him, and so rid themselves of him forever.

At first they did not seem inclined to enter upon this undertaking, but when they were told that one of their number was already searching for the scout, and perhaps by this time had slain him, they evinced their willingness to go.

Luke was inclined to think that they would not rejoin their companion, except in the spirit land; and motionless he stood and watched them as they bound Harry to a tree, and put out the remnants of the fire, that their dreaded enemy might not be attracted by it.

CHAPTER V.

THE FATE OF RUTH.

One of the savages was detailed to remain behind, and keep a close guard over the prisoner, and to see that no one approached the spot to attempt his rescue.

Then, in single file, the other savages glided away, and the scout listened until the sound of their footsteps was lost in the distance.

He could hardly repress a smile as he thought of their search for him in the darkness, while he was so close to the searchers that they might have laid their hands upon him as they passed.

But they were gone now, and the time had come for him to act. Before they could return he must free Harry from his bonds, and leave the spot behind them.

But this was no easy task, with the savage on the alert for the dreaded Death-Shadow.

There was no way to throw him off his guard, and so the redskin had the advantage on his side.

It was an easy thing to send an ounce of lead through him, but the report of the rifle would be the means of bringing the others back to the spot.

Then the scout did not care to deprive the savage of his life thus suddenly. He proposed asking a question or two in regard to the whereabouts or fate of Ruth, and if the savage knew anything about it, the scout meant that he should disclose it.

But how was he to do it?

This question Luke asked of himself over and over again. He could think of but one way in which this might be accomplished, but this was fraught with uncertainty and danger. It was to spring upon him where he stood, catch him by the throat, and bear him to the earth.

But this he had little chance of doing so long as the savage stood facing him. Before he could be seized he could, by crying out, give the alarm.

If he would but turn his face in an opposite direction for a moment, the scout felt that he could make the attempt successfully.

A sudden plan occurred to him whereby he thought he could accomplish this.

Stooping down, he felt round upon the earth until his hand encountered a small pebble. This was what he sought.

Straightening up again, he found that the savage had not changed his position.

Raising his arm, he threw the pebble over beyond the smoldering embers of the camp-fire, where it fell with a sharp thud.

It had the effect he intended.

In an instant the savage wheeled about and gazed in that direction.

This was Luke's opportunity.

Gathering all his strength, he bounded forward upon the savage with the quickness of thought.

The redskin heard him coming, and wheeled quickly about; but it was too late to make a successful resistance.

The hand of Luke was upon his throat, and in an instant he had borne him backward.

They went down to the earth together with a heavy thud, but the advantage was with the scout. He tightened his hold, if anything, instead of relaxing it.

A gurgling sound in the throat of the savage told that he was hastening his death faster than the scout intended.

He loosened his hold a little, for it was his intention to make the redskin speak, if possible.

He waited until the latter had got his breath, and then he said, in a voice well suited to strike terror to the heart of the savage:

"The Death-Shadow is upon you, and you cannot escape him. Where is the white maiden that you have stolen from her home?"

The savage made an attempt to speak, but the words died in his throat.

The scout loosened his grasp still more, saying, as he did so:

"Speak the truth, if you would live! If you do not I will send my knife into your heart!"

"Me tell Death-Shadow," gasped the savage, as he strove to recover his voice. "Let the pale-face take not the life of the red man."

Unlike the most of his race, had they been placed in a similar position, the form of the savage trembled with the fear for his life which was upon him. The dread he had of the terrible Death-Shadow was so great that his natural courage and dogged manner were entirely gone, and he was like clay in the hands of his captor, to be molded at will.

"Speak, then!" cried Luke. "You've got breath enough for that now. Tell me at once what you have done with Ruth Lee, or I'll choke the life out of you as I would crush it out of a snake I had beneath my heel!"

"The Death-Shadow may do so if the red man does not speak the truth. The white maiden is not here."

"I can see that," exclaimed Luke, impatiently. "Had she been here I should not have spared your life so long. She is not here, but what have you done with her?"

"The pale-face warrior has carried her away!"

"The pale-face warrior! Who do you mean by that? Be sure that you speak the truth, or my fingers will squeeze the life out of you."

"The red man's tongue is not crooked; the words he speaks are true ones. He means the white warrior who has made his home with the red men."

"Justin Litch," exclaimed the scout.

"The Death-Shadow has spoken his name."

"Where is he now?"

"He crossed the river with the white maiden soon after the dark shadows had come in the forest."

"Where has he gone with her?"

"To the village of the Miamis."

"Did this imp of darkness set you redskins up to the work?"

"The white warrior bade us watch for the maiden, and bring her to him when we could."

"But he didn't go to the settlement?"

"The pale-face came only to the river, where he lay hidden till we come."

"The villain!" cried the scout. "I wish my fingers were playing with his windpipe instead of yours. I'll make him pay dear for this night's job. I have been waiting until I had something that I could prove against him. Now I've got enough, I should guess."

The savage made no answer to this, as Luke had said it more to himself than anybody else.

For the space of a minute now he did not speak. He was revolving in his mind what he should do with the redskin, who lay beneath him so completely at his mercy.

His craving for vengeance, and a just regard for the safety of himself and Harry, and the rescue of Ruth, prompted him to kill the savage. But one thing stood in his way and made him hesitate.

To be sure, he had not promised the savage his life, but he had implied as much in case he would speak as to the whereabouts of Ruth. The redskin had done so, and without doubt had told the truth. To slay him now would seem too much like murder, even to one who had slain so many savages without a single feeling of remorse.

But how should he spare the Indian's life and insure the carrying out of his own plans at the same time?

At last the scout hit upon a plan, the only one which seemed at all feasible. He would gag his captive, bind him hand and foot, and, carrying him a little way from the camp-fire, leave him where his companions would not find him unless they stumbled upon him by chance.

He felt in his pocket for some cords, with which to accomplish this, but to his disappointment they were empty of what he sought.

There was no way to secure the savage then, except by transferring the cords that bound the limbs of Harry to those of his guard.

This he could not do without releasing his hold upon the latter, but he decided to run the risk.

Rising up from the prostrate body of the savage, he bade him get up, assuring him that the first effort he made to escape he should die.

Mutely the redskin obeyed, and then at a word from his captor, moved along by his side to the spot where Harry was confined, who had with the most intense interest witnessed all, but without being able to stir a limb or utter a sound.

Reaching his friend's side, the scout's first act was to remove the gag from the former's mouth, after warning him not to speak above a whisper.

This done, he essayed to untie the bonds that bound Harry's limbs, without cutting them, so that they might be transferred to those of the savage.

Hurriedly he worked away at them, but they were so tightly drawn that for a time he met with poor success.

In his eagerness to accomplish this, for an instant the scout did not pay that attention to his captive that he should have done.

The wary savage thought the opportunity had arrived to escape from the toils into which he had fallen, and on the instant he determined to make the attempt.

Grasping his tomahawk, which the scout had neglected to take from him, he aimed a blow which would have cloven Luke's head in twain had he not noticed the motion in time to throw out his arm, so that the weapon went wide of its mark.

That act of the savage was his doom. All thoughts of sparing him went out at once from the mind of Luke.

In another instant the two had closed together in a deadly struggle. Agile as the savage was, he stood no chance with the giant-like strength of the scout. In less than half a minute he was lying upon the earth, once more at the mercy of his antagonist.

But there was no longer any thought of mercy in the heart of Luke. It had fled away in this last attempt upon his life. In a moment he had buried his knife to the hilt in the breast of the savage, ending his career on the instant.

Springing to his feet, the scout spurned the body with his foot, and said, as he turned again toward Harry:

"He's out of the way. I am glad I got an excuse to finish him up. He knew altogether too much about us to

get loose again. Could he but have told the others, they would have had nothing to do but to follow on after us while we were hunting for Ruth and that bloody villain, Justin Litch. Now, if we can get away from here before they get back, they've got no clew to what we're going to do."

"For Heaven's sake, hurry up, Luke. These bonds are cutting through my flesh to the very bone, but that is not all. It maddens me to think that Ruth is alone, and in the power of Justin Litch. If he harms so much as a hair of her head he shall die a more terrible death than savage yet invented."

CHAPTER VI.

THE RENEGADES' TRAIL.

There was no need now of stopping to untie Harry's bonds. He for whom they were intended was fast in the stronger ones of death.

With a few thrusts of his knife the scout severed them, saying, as he did so:

"Don't be so impatient, Harry. 'Thar's nothing gained by being in a hurry in most cases. We've got the advantage so far, and I guess we can keep it."

The youth could hardly repress giving utterance to a cry of joy when he found himself free. Indeed he would have done so had it not been for a warning word on the part of his companion.

"Don't talk of not being in a hurry!" he exclaimed, in a low tone, a moment after. "Think if Ruth was your promised wife, and in the power of that villain. I can hardly contain myself when I think of the danger to which she is subjected."

"Be quiet, youngster. All this hurry and fluster on yer part won't do any good. We can't take the villain's trail and follow it until we find it, and that we shan't do until morning comes and shows it to us. What we want to do now is to get away from this spot as far as we can afore the varmints get back here. Should they come in upon us here we shouldn't stand much chance of getting away with our scalps where they ought to be."

He glided away from the spot as he uttered these words, and Harry followed him close. As it was, they had vacated the camp-ground none too soon, for within the space of three minutes after they had turned their backs upon it a fierce war-whoop, in which was mingled a howl of rage, told them that the redskins had returned from their unsuccessful search, and had discovered the fate of their comrade and the fact that their prisoner had escaped.

The bank of the river was reached, and the dark waters flowed in inky blackness before them. Here the scout paused, and bidding his companion remain silent, he listened intently for any sound that might reach his ear; but all about them was as silent as death. Wood and river were as noiseless as though a spell had been cast upon them by the wand of some great magician.

There was no evidence that the savages were near them. In the intense darkness their trail could not be followed, and if they hit upon it, it was by chance only.

"How are we to get to the other side?" asked Harry.

"There is no way but to swim for it, as I know of," answered Luke. "You are good in the water, I suppose?"

"I am counted a good swimmer," said Harry. "At any rate, I shall have no trouble in going the distance between here and the other bank."

"That is good. I guess, then, we may as well go over at this point as any other. On the other side we'll hang round until daylight comes, and then seek for the trail of the renegade. There won't be so much chance of the redskins falling upon us by chance over there as there will be if we remain here. We must get across before day-break, anyway."

"But why not keep on to the village?"

"Because I don't believe that Justin Litch has gone there?"

"Why?"

"Justin Litch has a wife there already."

"Not a white one?"

"No; but she is the daughter of a chief, and let him but carry Ruth to his lodge, and his life and hers wouldn't be worth a straw. The squaw would slay them both."

"I am not sure but that you are right, Luke. I might have known that you had some good reason for thinking as you did. But what do you think he will do with her now that he has her in his power?"

"Take her to some hiding-place which he may have in the forest, where his red wife may not suspect anything. It may be that he has some such spot no great ways from the village. I feel sure this is the case. Even if it should not be, we can't get to the village in season to do anything before daylight comes. We'll get across the river as soon as we can, and then, as soon as light breaks, we'll find where he crossed, and take his trail and follow it, wherever it may lead. That's my plan, and now, if you've got any other, let's hear it."

But Harry had none to offer. He was convinced that Luke was right, and he made up his mind to follow his lead, and advance no more schemes of his own. He felt that from the scout's long experience he knew far better what ought to be done, and that he could not leave the matter in better hands. Still, in his impatience, he did not relish the long hours of waiting which must ensue, but he saw no help for it.

Convinced that as yet there were no savages near them, Luke determined to lose no time in crossing over, so preparations were at once made for the passage.

Divesting themselves of their garments, they rolled them into bundles, and these they fastened upon their shoulders in such a manner that they would keep quite dry.

Ready for the task before them, the scout held his breath and listened intently for a moment, and then gently let himself into the water.

Harry, in a like cautious manner, followed close in his wake, and in this way they cleft the dark waters of the river until the opposite side was reached and they stood once more on firm soil.

"There! I think we've given them the slip nicely," said Luke, in a satisfied tone. "I don't believe the finest ear could have heard us in coming over. Now we'll get into our clothes, and then lay down for a little rest. You may go to sleep if you want to; I shall keep one eye open for the redskins, and will wake you at the first sign of daylight."

"Do not talk about sleep, Luke. I have no inclination to, and could not get a wink if my life was at stake. Morning can't be far off. I would give much if I could see it breaking in the eastward now."

"But you won't for some time yet, boy. It's best to take these things cool. Fretting won't mend matters, nor bring the sun up any sooner."

Harry knew that Luke was right, and so he tried as best he could to possess his soul with patience while the remaining hours of the night dragged slowly on.

Never had he known the minutes to go at such a snail's pace before. It seemed as though the light of the morning would never come.

If Luke Hawkins was at all impatient, he surely did not show it by his motions.

Stretched at full length upon the ground, he lay as immovable as a log. More than once Harry was convinced that he slept, although it might have been with one eye open, as he said. At any rate, he was upon his feet with the declaration that morning had come before Harry had even seen a ray of light which would warrant it.

But the scout was right, for in a little time a dull light in the east became perceptible. The clouds hung heavy along the sky, still giving signs of a storm which had threatened since evening.

A few words passed between them by way of consultation, and then they were ready for the work they had in hand.

From what the savage had said, Luke made up his mind that the renegade and his captive had crossed the river farther up, and so the first move was simply to follow up the bank of the river until they struck the trail. As soon as it was light enough to avoid the danger of their crossing without seeing it, they set out.

Carefully examining the ground at every step, they went onward for nearly half a mile. At a point where a little cove made in from the river, the quick eye of the scout discovered footprints leading from the water. Fol-

lowing them down to the edge of the stream, two discoveries were made.

There, upon the soft yielding sand, they beheld the footprints of a woman, and mingled with them were others, unmistakably those of a white man.

That they were those of Justin Litch and Ruth Lee, neither of them had a doubt.

There were marks at the water's edge, showing where they had landed, and, hidden in the bushes close at hand, the canoe in which they had crossed was found.

Nothing more was wanted to assure the two that they were on the right trail.

Carefully Luke scanned the river up and down, and the opposite bank as far as he could see, but not a trace of their enemies was visible. If there were any savages lurking near they were carefully hidden from sight.

Luke examined his rifle to assure himself that it had not got wet in crossing the river, and then he and Harry hurried along the trail of the renegade and his captive.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEN OF THE WOLF.

At length the day was fairly ushered in, and there was no difficulty in following the trail. Plainly it stretched out before them, leading away in the direction of the Miami village, which was some ten miles distant from the spot where the trail had crossed the river.

No adventure worth narrating occurred to them as they hurried onward. A couple of times they crossed fresh Indian trails, but as they led in the general direction of the village, the signs gave them no uneasiness. They might be hunting-parties, or some of those who had escaped the fate of their companions beyond the river. Whichever they were did not concern our friends so long as they gave them no trouble.

Onward and still onward they kept, and at last the scout, pausing, announced to Harry two things. One was that the hour of noon was nigh at hand, and the other, that he was so hungry that he was not going another step until he had had something to refresh the inner man.

"But are we not near the village?" asked Harry, anxiously.

"From the lay of the land I should say that it was a good two miles away," answered Luke.

"But we shall lose time if we stop here; besides, will it not be risky kindling a fire so near to the enemy?"

"We've got time enough, youngster. We can't do any more than to find out the whereabouts of the gal until night comes. I ain't one of those chaps that can live on air, although I can go some time without eating when there's need of it. There is no telling when we shall get a chance again, so I go in for improving this. Do you kindle a fire in this hollow here, and I'll bring you in something to roast in a few minutes."

"You are not going to discharge your rifle here, I hope!" said Harry, apprehensively.

"I didn't say I was, youngster. There's ways to get game besides taking it with a bullet. You mind the fire, and I'll soon have something to roast on it, without making much of a hubbub, either."

Seeing that the scout was determined upon a meal, Harry made no more objections, but set at once about the task before him, while Luke disappeared over the brow of the hill.

He was not gone long, and, by the time the fire was burning brightly, he came back bearing a rabbit in his hand, which he had slain with a stone as easily as he could have done with his rifle.

To prepare it for the coals was the work of only a few moments, and soon it was resting thereon and sending forth a savory smell, which was grateful to them both, as neither had tasted food for twenty-four hours.

Under the careful superintendence of the scout, it was done to a turn, and, after allowing it a proper time to cool, they fell to, and devoured it with a relish such as only one knows who has gone long without food and kept up hard manual exertion all the time.

The last mouthful was picked from the bones, and Harry had risen to his feet, when, casting a glance upward

to the summit of the slight eminence before them, he beheld the form of a savage glide behind the trunk of a large tree which was standing there.

"What is it?" demanded Luke, who chanced at that moment to have his eyes fixed upon the face of his companion, and saw that he had discovered something which caused him to start.

"There is a savage up there, watching us," he answered.

"Where?" exclaimed the scout, springing to his feet and grasping his rifle, which was leaning against a tree beside him.

Harry pointed to the tree behind which he had disappeared.

"Then he has seen us," said Luke.

"Of course he has. Most likely the smoke from our fire attracted his attention first."

"Consarn the tarnal luck that sent him there!" muttered the scout. "He ought to have an ounce of lead put through him, but I hate to do it so near as we are to the hive of the redskins. I'm afraid it would bring a swarm of 'em down upon us."

"I'm afraid so, too. I felt as though we should not have stopped here. But what shall we do? No doubt, from his shelter up there, he's watching all our movements."

"We must get rid of him some way—put him off his guard, and off the scent if we can."

"But how can we do it?"

"By making him believe that we are on a hunt for game, instead of human beings."

"I don't see how that can be done."

"We must leave the trail here and start off in another direction."

"But can we find it again?"

"Yes, easily enough, after we've got rid of him. We must try it, any way. It will never do for us to let him dog our steps along the trail. We've got to get clear of him somehow. If he means to follow us I'll find some way to send him under without making too big a fuss about it. Come on now. We'll leave here, and try and make him think we've not seen him. But we'll keep one eye upon his motions, though."

Quietly they left the spot, apparently as unconcerned as though they knew not that an enemy was near.

Leaving the trail upon their left hand, they went on at an ordinary pace, as though pursuit of game was their only object.

Not a hundred rods had they gone, however, before they became aware that the savage was following them.

Still they used every precaution to make him think that they were not aware of this fact.

A half-mile was gone over, and still he followed them like a shadow.

Evidently there was little prospect that they would be able to shake him off in this way. Some other means must be devised to get rid of his unwelcome presence. Every step they were taking now was carrying them away from the object of their search.

"He's got to go under," exclaimed the scout, at length. "I've thought so all the time. The quickest and surest way is to put a bullet through him, but that won't do. There mustn't be much noise about the job. When we get out of sight of him again for a minute, we'll lay a trap for him to fall into that I guess will be a sure thing."

In a few words he confided to Harry what his plan was, and an opportunity was soon afforded for him to try it.

At the bottom of a sharp hill they were for a minute out of sight of the savage.

Bidding Harry keep on at the same pace they had been going, for a few rods, he ensconced himself behind the trunk of a large tree near which they passed, which completely concealed him from any one coming along their trail.

Here he waited for the coming of the savage, whom he had made up his mind should follow them no farther.

He had hardly stood there two minutes when he heard the light footsteps of the savage approaching the spot.

Clubbing his rifle, the scout stood holding it ready for instant use.

Nearer and nearer came the savage, and at last he was abreast the tree.

Moving on a few feet, he suddenly paused, and bending

down, appeared to be closely scrutinizing the trail. Evidently he had a suspicion that one footprint was missing.

This was the scout's opportunity, and quick as thought he improved it.

With footsteps so light that not a dry leaf was rustled by them, he stepped from behind the tree toward his intended victim.

Swinging his rifle above his head, he made ready to deal a deadly blow.

At that very instant the savage glanced round and saw his danger; but it was too late for him to escape it. The breach of Luke's rifle was even then descending, and in an instant's time it fell upon its intended mark.

The blow was one that would have felled an ox, and the redskin went down to the earth with his skull crushed like an egg-shell.

His body quivered for an instant, and then all sign of life was gone.

Luke gave a loud whistle, which was the signal agreed upon between him and Harry, and in a few moments the latter came hurrying back to the spot.

A glance at the dead savage lying at the feet of the scout told him how well his plan had succeeded.

"You had better take his tomahawk and knife," said Luke. "You've lost your weapons, and they are better than none at all."

"You meant to make sure of him," said Harry, with a shudder, as he obeyed these directions. "The blow you gave him was more than double that which was needed to do the work."

"I don't calculate to leave anything half-done," answered Luke. "'Tain't my way. When you're doing anything, do it well, is my motto. But come on. Don't let us lose no more time here. We must get on the trail again as soon as we can. We must track the wolf who has carried off the lamb to his den afore the night comes again, and there's no telling how far we shall have to go. I wish that it was Justin Litch that laid there, with his head mashed to a jelly, instead of this redskin. But it ain't, and wishing won't make it so."

They paused not for further words, but turned back and hurried along toward the point where they had parted from the trail.

They soon struck it, and again pushed forward, determined to make no more pauses if they could help it until they had discovered the retreat of the renegade.

For something like a mile more the trail led on toward the village of the Miamis, and then, just as Luke had begun to think that Justin Litch had carried Ruth there after all, he found that his first surmises were correct, for the trail turned abruptly to the northward, as though it were the intention of the renegade to avoid the village; or else, as the scout more than half-suspected for reasons already given, he was taking his captive to some hiding-place which he thought was known to himself alone.

The scout pointed out to Harry the direction in which the village lay and the new course apparently taken by the trail, and he felt that Luke had stated the truth of the case at the outset.

"We must move cautiously now I suppose?" he said. "At any time we are liable to come upon him or some of the redskins belonging to the village."

"You are right, boy. We've got to keep both eyes and ears open. It's a kinder ticklish game we are playing, and we don't hold many of the winning cards. But what we lack in 'em we've got to make up some other way. If Justin Litch is the cunning villain I think he is, he'll watch well for danger. He must think that somebody will follow him, and so will be on the lookout for them."

"And it seems strange to me that some one from the settlement has not. Her absence must have been missed long ago."

"It ain't every one of them that can follow a trail so as not to stray from it. It ain't been an easy job for you and I to do so, used as we are to the work. But I believe, after all, that we shall be a match for Justin Litch. Let us go on and find out what sort of a hole this trail runs into as soon as we can."

A half-mile farther on, and the trail turned still more to the left. Evidently the renegade wished to give the village a still wider berth.

For some little time they had seen, whenever an opening was afforded them through the trees, a high bluff rising before them, crowned with a mass of broken rocks.

The trail now turned again, so as to lead directly toward this.

Arrived at last to within something like thirty yards of its foot, the scout exclaimed, in a low tone:

"There's where he's hidden her, youngster. Somewhere among them rocks the wolf has his den."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STORMY MEETING.

Harry gazed up at the mass of rocks and bushes towering above them, as though he were trying to single out the spot where Ruth was hidden away. But there was no clew to guide him in this search, and so he turned his gaze to the face of his companion.

"So you are sure they are in there?"

"Almost; but we can soon find out. If the trail goes no farther, of course this is the spot. It won't take us a great while to go clean round this place, and as it is no use to keep on the trail any longer, we will leave it here. If we want to take it again when it begins to grow dark, we shall know where to find it. Follow me, and be careful. I'm going to make sure whether it goes any farther or not. If we can go round the hill and come to this place again without hitting upon it, of course it stops here."

Leaving the trail, they struck off to the right, and slowly and carefully made their way along. It was a gloomy spot, and a silence like that of death brooded around. The storm which had threatened since the evening before had not broken yet, and the clouds, which hung so low as to almost touch the summit of the rocks, added to the dreariness of the scene.

Carefully examining the ground as they went, and keenly alert to anything which might afford them a clew, they passed on, and in less than half an hour's time were close upon the spot where they had left the trail. No signs of it had they found in their search, which demonstrated beyond a doubt that Justin Litch and Ruth Lee were somewhere in the vicinity.

To find the spot where they were hidden, without revealing themselves to the renegade, was now the matter they had in hand.

With the utmost caution, they approached the trail again, and then slowly moved forward along toward the base of the hill, doing their best to keep under cover of the thick foliage, so that there would be less chance of their being observed by Justin Litch, in case he was on the lookout at some point high up among the rocks, watching for danger.

A thick growth covered the ground at this point, and in some places the undergrowth was so tangled that it was all they could do to force their way through it.

Slowly they made their way along, and were getting well up toward the foot of the cliff, when suddenly Luke paused and uttered a low, warning signal.

"What is it?" demanded Harry, in a low tone.

"Hush! There is some one ahead of us. Haven't you heard the notes of the whip-poor-will once or twice within a few minutes?"

"Yes, and wondered at it, while it is so light as it is now."

"It ain't a bird, youngster, but it is somebody that can make a sound mighty like one."

"How do you know that a bird didn't make it? I could have sworn that it came from the throat of one, and nothing else."

"Because there came an answer from the rocks up there. Keep quiet now, and see if I'm not right."

This conversation had been carried on in a tone that was little above a whisper, and now they stood in silent expectancy.

For the space of a minute there was a profound silence, and then the notes of the whip-poor-will rose from a point only a few yards in advance of them.

Good as the imitation was, they were now positive that it never came from the throat of a bird.

If any more proof was needed, they had it a moment after.

sily in imitation that it was impossible for any one deceived by it.

crow may as well attempt to sing, Justin Litch," spered the scout.

"Do you think that was him?" said Harry, eagerly.

"I am sure of it. Somebody has come to pay him a visit, and we must find out who it is and what they're up to, if an. Follow me close, and as you hope to save the gal, no noise. The rattle of a leaf or the snapping of a twig may betray us."

"Have no fears. I will go as softly as if walking on air."

With the greatest caution, they crept forward toward the spot from whence the nearest signal had come.

Once more it was repeated and answered, and then all still.

cautiously they moved onward. A falling snow-flake had made as much sound among the dead leaves but strewed the ground as did their footsteps.

They were close upon the spot before their searching gaze found that for which they sought.

Standing by the trunk of a large tree was a young Indian woman.

As motionless as though made of stone she stood there in her eyes fixed upon the hillside above her.

and as straight as an arrow, and clad in garments denoted her rank in the tribe, she might have been as a model of her race, so graceful was her shape.

ough they had not seen her face, they knew from her pose and the motionless manner in which she stood, some strong emotion pervaded her entire being.

Neither of them were long in surmising the truth—it is the Indian wife of Justin Litch.

stirring from their tracks, and almost holding their breath for fear of being discovered, our friends waited for the coming of him whom they knew could be none other than Justin Litch.

A suspicion of the Indian girl's errand had already reached to them. In some way she had learned of the presence of Ruth Lee.

possibly some of the savages who had accompanied the renegade the day previous had returned to the village, made known to her the errand on which he had gone, which with their aid he had successfully accomplished.

A few minutes footsteps were heard approaching the where the Indian girl stood, and Justin Litch emerged from the tangled thicket, and confronted her.

At the first glance Harry knew that the Lees, mother and daughter, had not been mistaken in his identity.

the description they had given him, he knew that their olden enemy, Hiram Bailey, who stood before him. As they had suspected, the name of Justin Litch was an assumed one.

The first glance Justin Litch—for so we shall continue to call him—gave Morning Star, told him that something was coming, but his guilty heart told him at once the

the scorn and anger which she felt in her heart was upon her countenance as she confronted him, he said:

Why has the Morning Star sought the home of her pale husband? Is it because he has been so long from that she is impatient to look upon his face?"

It would have been well for the daughter of the chief she had never looked upon the face of the white man.

in may be the color of the earth in winter, but his is as black as the sky when the thunderbolt sounds and the red lightning plays among the clouds."

Why does Morning Star talk thus to the pale-face? has he done that has changed her love to hate?"

the pale-face ask of his own wicked heart. It will be better than the Indian girl can do."

the heart of the pale-face tells him nothing. He cannot where he has done amiss, that Morning Star should tell him with angry words, and a frown on her face."

the pale-faces all speak lies. Their words are crooked, they are not to be trusted. The one to whom Morning

give her heart is no better than the others. Let him tell why he has brought a maiden of his own race to

ret hiding-place among the rocks, where he would let the foot of the Indian girl step."

told this lie to her ears?" said the renegade, boldly.

The eyes of the Indian girl flashed fire, and a look of unutterable scorn shone upon her face.

"Did Morning Star not say that the heart of the pale-face was black, and that his words were crooked? Would he know who it was that told the truth to her ears? It was one of the warriors that went with him, and stole her from her home for him."

"Springing Panther told her, then. It was he that wanted her in his lodge. Will Morning Star believe the lies that he speaks of her husband?"

"Springing Panther has not lied; his words are straight ones. Where are the warriors who went with him? Let him ask the Death-Shadow, who slew them while they were doing the bidding of the pale-face."

"I know not where they are," answered the renegade, evasively.

"There are more crooked words. The Death-Shadow has slain them. But Morning Star has other ways of knowing. Her eyes are sharp, and she knows how to read a trail. She has seen the track of the pale-face maiden which she left behind when she came here. She is hidden up yonder among the rocks, and Morning Star will find her and take her life."

Evidently with this exhibition of proof which she possessed, the renegade saw that it was no use to try and deceive her further as to the presence of Ruth in his hiding-place. There was a look for a moment upon his face which told as plainly as words, that he was tempted to take her life then and there, and so rid himself of her forever. But the look was gone again in an instant, as though he had made up his mind that this would be a dangerous game for him to play. Morning Star was a favorite with all the tribe, in spite of the dissatisfaction that was felt in the choice she had made of a husband, and he knew well that if he harmed her, and it was laid to his door, that they would most fearfully avenge her. It would doom him to a death that their utmost cruelty could devise.

Although the Indian girl had not failed to read what was passing in his mind, she stood undaunted before him.

"Let the Morning Star listen, and she shall know all," said the villain, with what he intended should be a smile upon his face. "Her pale-face husband has been speaking crooked words to her. The white maiden is hidden away in the cliff up yonder, where he has never allowed the feet of his Indian bride to come."

"The pale-face has done well to tell Morning Star that which she knew before," said the girl, contemptuously. "Let him rather tell her why it is that he has carried the maiden there. If he is tired of his Indian bride, let him say so at once."

"Morning Star knows better than that. He loves her as he does his life."

"Morning Star is not a fool or a child," she said. "She knows now that she stands in the way of his new love. But let him speak more crooked words if he will. Let him tell why it is that he brought the pale-face maiden here."

"Let the Indian girl listen and she shall hear. It is the truth he will speak to her ears, if she will but believe it."

He looked her in the face to see how this statement was received, but there was no change perceptible there. Then he went on:

"Many moons ago the pale-face fled away from those of his own race, and took up his home with the red men. He could not stay, for his life was in danger, and so he had to hide himself away in the forest. It was this same white maiden's father that drove him away, and he swore that the time would come when he would have vengeance for it. It has come in part. Not many moons ago he slew his enemy with his own hand while he was abroad in the forest. He knew who it was that took his life, and that was a joy to Morning Star's brave. But that was not all I wanted. I still wished for vengeance upon those that bore his name. I heard that a young hunter was soon to make his daughter his wife, and to fill my cup of vengeance I determined to get her into my hands. So I laid my plans, and they worked well. Yesterday the warriors stole her away for me, and now she is safe up there, in

my power to do with her as I will. Now the Morning Star knows why it is that the white maiden is here."

"The Indian girl has heard the words of the pale-face, and she will believe what she chooses. If it was vengeance that he wanted why did he not take her life and bring her scalp to his lodge?"

"Because he wished her to be offered as a sacrifice when the harvest feast of the tribe came."

"Then he should have brought her to the prison lodge, so that the death-council could have doomed her to the stake."

"To that place she shall go on the morrow. Let the Morning Star go back to her lodge, and be tormented with no fears of her pale-face husband. His heart is hers, and hers alone. To-night the white maiden stays where he has placed her, and when the morning comes he will care not how soon the flames spring up about her."

To Luke and Harry it seemed impossible that the Indian girl would be content with this explanation and promise, yet she appeared to be. For a few moments longer they conversed together in an amiable manner, and then parted, apparently as good friends as they had ever been.

CHAPTER IX.

A TOILSOME SEARCH.

The Indian girl, as she parted from Justin Litch, came slowly toward the spot where Luke and Harry were standing.

For a moment it seemed to them that escape was impossible, and to be discovered now would ruin all their plans.

They were not concerned for their own safety, as each felt himself a match for Justin Litch and the Indian girl, as matters stood now.

From what they had heard, they felt sure that the Indian girl did not know where Ruth was hidden, and could not aid in their quest even if she could be enlisted by force or otherwise to be their guide.

Their only hope of finding a clew was by watching the motions of Justin Litch when he should quit the spot where he stood. But fortune favored them here, as it had all the time for the last twenty-four hours. When about half-way between the spot where the interview had taken place, and that on which they stood, the girl turned suddenly to the right and hurriedly disappeared in the thicket. Both experienced a sensation of relief as they caught a last glimpse of her form through the thick foliage.

Now they turned their gaze once more on the person of the renegade. Upon his motions all depended. As yet he had not moved from his tracks, but stood gazing in the direction in which his late companion had disappeared.

For the space of a minute he stood, and then he turned upon his heel and walked slowly away in the opposite direction.

No sooner had he disappeared from sight than Harry started eagerly forward.

But the scout, laying his hand upon his arm, stopped him.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"To follow him, of course; we've lost sight of him even now."

"Let him go. It ain't time for us to move from here yet. In climbing up among the rocks yonder what is to hinder his looking down upon us if we're directly under him? Let him go on a while yet; he can't take his trail along with him."

"He can, all that he will leave up there among the rocks," said Harry, impatient at the delay.

"Let him then. Don't be worried, boy. Luke Hawkins ain't spent so many years of his life trailing redskins that a white renegade can fool him. Justin Litch must have a tight trap up there if I can't find my way into it."

Harry said no more, although he was so impatient to go on that he could not remain inactive in his tracks if his life depended upon it. He knew enough of Luke to feel that it was useless to hurry him or to try and make him change any plan which he might have formed. There was nothing for him to do but to content himself as best he could until the scout was ready to move.

Not more than three minutes did Luke remain inactive,

although to Harry it seemed an almost endless period of time. Then, instead of following along in the tracks of the renegade, Luke merely moved a few rods to the left, where there was a little open space which commanded an uninterrupted view of the rocks towering above.

Here they waited and watched for the appearance of the renegade above the tree-tops. Once above them, among the rocks, Luke felt sure that he could watch his course toward his hiding place, but Harry did not share in this belief.

Although they waited impatiently for his appearance, they got no glimpse of him.

Fully fifteen minutes went by before the scout would own to himself that he had made a mistake in his conjectures as to the location of the renegade's hiding-place.

From the signals which the latter had given in answer to the Indian girl, he felt convinced that it was well up toward the summit of the cliffs, and that he could reach it in no way without exposing himself to view from below.

In this he was mistaken, or else Litch had not gone directly to it.

Convinced now that he should learn nothing from where they were, he bade Harry follow him, and with swift footsteps they passed on to the spot where the interview between the renegade and the Indian girl had taken place.

From this point the trail left by the former was plainly discernible.

Turning to Harry, Luke said, in a low tone:

"Come on now, but be mighty careful how you handle yer feet or yer tongue. I ain't sure but what the villain has scented danger and is hanging round here now. It never'll do to let him turn the tables on us. The villain is as cunning as a fox, and we must look sharp for his tricks."

"Have no fears for me," answered Harry, in the same low tone. "But in Heaven's name waste no more time. It maddens me when I think of that villain being with my Ruth with no one to protect her from him. Let me but catch sight of him again and I will have his life, although it brings every Miami warrior down upon me that there is in all this section of country."

"And that you would have done, and lost the gal and your own life to boot," muttered Luke, as he crept slowly along the trail.

With the caution born only of long experience in such a calling, and a knowledge of the prize which was at stake, they climbed up the steep way before them, along the trail the renegade had left.

Quick glances were cast behind every tree and rock, to catch a glimpse of him should he be lingering there, but no sight of him repaid their search.

Ever and anon they cast a searching glance behind them, to assure themselves that they had not passed him, and that he was stealing along in their rear. But the closest scrutiny showed no signs of him, either there or before them.

He had disappeared from their sight as effectually as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

Higher and higher they clambered, until at last they were close upon the line where the forest ceased, and only bare, rugged rocks lay.

Scattered around them on either side were huge boulders, which in former times had toppled from the cliffs above, and had clung to the hillside instead of continuing their course on to the valley below.

Among these the trail wound in and out until the boundary line of which we have already spoken was reached. Here it came to an end. Try as they would they could get no clew to it beyond. A large flat rock lay before it, which it appeared to cross, but not to go beyond.

All before them now was a mass of broken cliffs, across which it would be impossible for a vestige of a trail to be made.

Around it on every side they sought some clew to guide them, but without avail.

It seemed as though the rock must have opened and swallowed both the renegade and his trail.

For once in his life Luke Hawkins was obliged to own to himself that he was completely foiled. Still no thought of giving over the search occurred to either of them. The

mind of each was made up never to leave the spot unless Ruth Lee went with them. Although they could not see the sun, they knew that night was not far distant. As soon as darkness should come down there would be an end to their search for that night. They could hope to find nothing in the blackness which would envelope everything.

Leaving the rock where the trail ended, they clambered still higher, seeking for it.

Along in a zigzag course they worked their way upward, and at last the summit was reached. Still they were without a clew. Below them lay the forest, stretching as far away as the eye could reach on either side. The Miami village was close at hand, so near that they could count the lodges it contained.

For a few minutes they stood there without a word passing between them, while a perceptible increase of the gloom about them gave token that night was close at hand.

CHAPTER X.

THE INDIAN GIRL'S VICTIM.

When Morning Star parted with the villain whom she had learned to love, at the close of their interview at the foot in the cliffs, it was with far different thoughts and intentions in her mind than those which he supposed dwelt there. In her own heart she felt sure that he had become enamored of the pale-face maiden, and would not fulfill the promise he had made of bringing her to the village on the morrow, to be consigned to the death-lodge, and then to a death at the stake at the harvest feast.

She felt sure that he was deceiving her, and that the white maiden would be taken to his heart, and so usurp the place she had so long filled, and she determined that he should be foiled in his plans.

Unknown to him, she had long possessed the secret of his hiding-place. Strong and secure as he had thought it, she had many times stood within its walls. She had learned how to undo the fastenings to the door which he had contrived, and with a knowledge of the entrance to the secret passage, could enter and leave it at will.

This knowledge would now serve her purpose well. She would call him again from the cavern when the darkness had set in, and when he returned again the white maiden should be gone. Then he might think that his captive had in some way made her escape in his absence and could not lay the disappearance to her charge.

But in her heart the squaw said that the white maiden should die.

Rapidly she formed a plan to accomplish her ends, and then hurried away to get help in carrying it out. Her course was toward the village, but she did not have to go there for it. It was nearer at hand.

By the side of a brook that ran noisily about the base of the hill, she found her sister, Bending Willow, waiting where she had left her until she should return.

For several minutes they conversed earnestly together, and laid their plans for action. To her sister she confided what had passed between her and the renegade, and then unfolded the plot she had formed, and the part she wished her to take in it. Her plan was as follows:

As soon as it was dark they were to proceed together to the spot where she had so lately parted with her husband. Here Bending Willow was to remain while she clambered up to his hiding-place and had gained a point so near that he could not fail to hear the signal she would give, and which she knew would bring him forth from the cavern. But she would be careful that he should not find her, and when he gave an answering signal Bending Willow was to reply to it in her stead. When he had descended to the spot where their interviews often took place, she would hasten to carry out the plan she had formed of ridding herself of her white rival. But Bending Willow must be careful that he should not see her, or he would mistrust what was going on, and all might fail. The darkness would be so great that it would be easy enough to elude him, even when he was close upon her.

Bending Willow promised that her part should not fail, and when all was arranged they waited for the moment

to come when they should attempt the carrying out of their plans.

As soon as it was dark Morning Star led the way back to the spot where she had parted with the renegade.

Once more she charged her sister with the part she was to play, and then made her way up the steep ascent to the entrance of the cave, which Justin Litch had flattered himself was known to him alone.

It was not far from the spot where Luke Hawkins and Harry had lost all clew of the trail among the rocks.

Down at the foot of a huge boulder there was a narrow opening, scarcely large enough to admit of the passage of a full-grown person. A smaller boulder lay beside it, so nicely balanced that only a little effort was necessary to move it one side.

This the Indian girl did without difficulty, and the passage was enlarged sufficiently to enable any one to pass through without difficulty.

Listening a moment, to make sure that there was no one without, she gave utterance to the signal.

For the space of a couple of minutes she waited, and then, while anger grew hot within her bosom, she repeated it. Her faithless husband was too busy with his new love to answer her call.

A little later, and a ray of light flashing out told her that he was coming at last.

Hastily she fled away and ensconced herself where it would be next to impossible for her to be discovered.

She could not see him from her hiding-place, owing to the darkness, but she heard his footsteps as he came forth upon the rock.

Evidently he thought that the signal had been given not far away, and so he was searching for her. At length, as though impatient at his fruitless search, he gave utterance to the answering signal.

There was a minute of profound silence, and then, just as she had begun to think that Bending Willow had forgotten her part, the cry of the whip-poor-will came from below.

It was a good imitation, and she felt that he must be misled by it; but for a moment she was kept in suspense as to whether he would obey the signal or not.

Muttered oaths fell from his lips, and words that told her that she was indeed no longer beloved by him as he professed.

Then she heard his footsteps slowly descending, and she knew that the coast was clear for her.

Stealing from her place of concealment, she approached the entrance of the cavern once more.

Before descending into the gloomy passage, she listened again for his footsteps.

Should he return and find her there, she doubted not but that her life would pay the forfeit.

The echo of his steps sounded farther and farther away down the steep declivity, and she knew that for the next few minutes she would have nothing to fear from him. By that time he might return if he would, but he would find no trace of the maiden who had come between her and him. She should be where he would never set eyes on her alive again.

Hastily she descended into the passage and groped her way along until she came to the door. But this did not impede her progress long. It had opened too often to her before to obstruct her passage now.

The fastenings which Justin Litch had made so secure were undone, and throwing open the door, she stepped within the cavern.

Closing it behind her, she took a couple of steps forward, and then paused and gazed about the cavern.

Ruth Lee was sitting by a table, and the light falling upon her face showed all her fair beauty, despite the paleness which was upon her countenance.

It was all that the girl could do to resist the impulse to spring upon Ruth and slay her where she sat. But this she knew would never do. To find her murdered there would be a clew that Justin Litch could follow up until her agency in the matter was discovered.

He must be led to think that she had managed to escape, and then, if her mangled body was found without, he would think that mayhap she had perished by falling over the cliffs.

Thus she reasoned and laid her plans, while her eyes were fixed with a deadly light upon the form of her victim.

At the sound of the Indian girl's footsteps Ruth had turned her face apprehensively toward the door, thinking that it was Justin Litch returning. Her surprise was great at the sight of the Indian girl; but the look that the latter gave her did not leave her long in doubt as to who she was. It told as plainly as words could have done that it was the wife of the renegade, of whom she had heard, and Ruth was not long in reading upon her face that she was regarded as a dangerous rival.

A sudden hope came to her on the moment. Might there not be a chance to escape from the meshes Justin Litch had woven around her? To rid herself of a rival, would not the girl before her help her to escape?

As drowning men are said to catch at straws, so did she grasp as eagerly at this hope. Rising from her seat, she took a step forward, holding out her hands imploringly, and saying, in a tone of piteous entreaty:

"Save me! Let the Indian girl listen to my prayers. If her heart is not as hard as these stones about us, she will help me to escape from him who has brought me here."

There was a look of triumph on the face of Morning Star.

It was the very thing she wished, to have the pale-face maiden willing to trust herself to her guidance. One part of her programme was thus easily arranged. With Ruth once without, she felt that she would have no difficulty in carrying out the other. Then she would be completely at her mercy.

"What, does the white maiden tire of her lover, that she would flee from the nest where he has placed her while he is gone?"

"The pale-face is no lover of the white maiden. Her heart turns from him as from an evil thing. There is another among her own people who has won her love. My heart tells me that her captor is dear to you. Are you not the wife of Justin Litch?"

"The pale-face is my husband," answered Morning Star. "I am the daughter of a chief, and for love of him I went to dwell in his lodge many moons ago."

"But now he would cast you off, and take me in your place. He has said as much to me. For your sake as well as my own, do not let him do this thing."

There was a lurid and determined light in the eye of the Indian girl, but she replied, as though hesitating:

"What can Morning Star do? She is but a squaw, and her arm is not strong like that of a warrior."

"You can help me to escape from this place. Only set me free from the power of Justin Litch, and I will always bless you. Let me perish in the forest, if I must. Death there, with only the wild beasts about me, is better than life here with him. Say that you will do your best to set me free from him."

"The ears of Morning Star have heard the words of the white maiden, and her heart is well toward her. She shall escape from him who is false to her and to the Indian girl whom he promised to love. But the moments are as swift as the wings of the eagle, and he will soon be back. Let the white maiden follow, and she shall escape from this place."

"Heaven bless you!" cried Ruth, the thoughts of escape giving her new strength. "Do not lose a moment, but let us go at once. I shall breathe freer when the air of heaven is once more around me."

"Let the white maiden follow, but her steps must be like the snow-flakes when they fall in winter. Let her tongue, also, be as silent as the frozen lake. The pale-face's ears are sharp, and if he finds us his wrath will be like the tempest when the dark days of autumn have come."

"The pale-face maiden hears, and she will obey," answered Ruth.

"Then let her follow, and all will be well."

Morning Star turned toward the door as she spoke, and opened it, and for a moment stood in the attitude of listening. But no sound came from without, so she beckoned Ruth through; and leaving the door standing ajar, as the latter might have done in her hurried escape, they went onward, and soon emerged into the open air.

Never before had Ruth experienced such a feeling of relief as she did at that moment; and had she dared, she would have called aloud her blessings upon the head of her supposed deliverer.

But had she known the thoughts that were passing in the mind of her guide, she would have shuddered at the terrible peril which hung above her head.

No thought of mercy was in the heart of the Indian girl toward her helpless companion.

Only with the death of the white maiden, which should be sure and speedy, could she hope to win back the love of her husband. Did she allow her to go at liberty, he would follow on her trail and bring her back.

The moving boulder she swung into its place again, and then she paused and listened. No sound came from below to give her a clew as to the movements of Justin Litch. What had passed between him and Bending Willow, had they met, she could not tell.

She was just on the point of bidding Ruth follow her, when a slight sound coming from below fell upon her ear.

Could it be that he was returning thus soon? At any rate, there was no time for her to lose.

"Come," she said, in a whisper to Ruth. "Let us go. The pale-face is coming."

Ruth shrank closer to her, as though for protection, and they moved away from the spot.

Escape from the clutches of the renegade was more than she had dared to hope for, but now it seemed as though it was on the eve of fulfillment, it seemed to her as though she could not be half thankful enough for this mercy.

The course taken by the Indian girl was toward the summit of the cliffs, and after a little time it was with difficulty that Ruth could keep pace with her.

At some places along which they passed, a single misstep would have sent them down to certain death upon the jagged rocks below.

By these Morning Star led the way, and they were passed in safety.

One would have thought by this that she had given over her terrible purpose; but she had not.

At last the summit of the cliffs was reached, and they paused for breath upon the very edge of a rock that made a sheer descent of a hundred feet.

Overcome by fatigue, and with her strength fast failing her, Ruth would have sunk down in her tracks had not the Indian girl at that moment turned upon her, and with a violent thrust, sent her toppling over the very verge of the fearful abyss which yawned at their feet.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DOOM OF THE RENEGADE.

A wild cry of horror and despair came from the lips of Ruth as she felt herself going down to a terrible death in the fearful chasm below.

Then as she felt herself sinking down, a strong arm was suddenly thrust beneath her, and she was brought back to the solid rock, while a voice which sent a joyous thrill through her entire being, exclaimed:

"Ruth—my Ruth—Heaven be praised that you are restored to me again."

It was the voice of her lover, Harry Libby, that sounded in her ears, and his strong arm had saved her from the terrible death with which she was menaced.

Her emotions were too great for her to speak, but she clung to him as a vine clings to the giant tree for support. In the meantime Luke Hawkins had not been idle.

At the instant Morning Star had given her intended victim the push which she meant should send her over the cliff he had started up from the spot where himself and Harry had been concealed from the moment when they had been aware of the approach of the two females, and caught the Indian girl by the arm with a grip like that of a vise.

For a few moments the Indian girl struggled to free herself from Luke's hold, but it was without avail. She might as well have hoped to escape from the embrace of a grizzly.

The struggle had the effect of bringing Ruth Lee to herself, so that she managed to exclaim:

"Do not harm her, Luke. For my sake, do her no injury; she is not so much to blame. She is the wife of Justin Litch, and she helped me to escape from the place where he held me a prisoner. Had it not been for her you could never have found me. But she considered me a rival. She thought that Justin Litch was going to cast her off and make me his wife instead. Had it not been for that she would not have attempted to do me harm."

"The pale-face maiden has read the heart of Morning Star aright. It was that which made her seek her life. But the Death-Shadow may do with her as he will. He has slain many of her kindred, and the Indian girl is not afraid to follow them to the Spirit Land."

"Didn't I tell you that I don't make war on squaws? I ain't redskin enough for that, though I wish there wa'n't one of the race left on the face of the earth. Jest answer me a question or two I'm going to put to you, and you shan't be hurt. Where is that black-hearted renegade you look for a husband?"

Morning Star will not speak. She knows that the Death-Shadow would take his life. He is her husband, and though he be false to her, she will not have his blood upon her head."

"Hush!" cried Harry, in a low tone. "There is some one down yonder."

In a moment they were all listening intently to again catch the sound that had reached the ears of Harry.

Some one below was giving utterance to angry expressions. They knew at once who it was, and the cause thereof. Justin Litch had discovered the escape of Ruth.

This and the wild goose chase on which he had gone in search of her who had given the signal, had rendered him insane with passion.

He knew at once that it could be the work of no other than Morning Star; therefore he was breathing aloud dire threats of vengeance upon her.

He knew that it was not possible for her to be far away, and he was searching wildly for her among the rocks, convinced that he would not set eyes on Ruth Lee alive. He felt that the wronged Indian girl would slay her at once, and wondered that she had not done so in the cave the moment she had found her way there.

If she had killed Ruth she should die the most fearful death he could inflict upon her.

In an instant Luke Hawkins bethought himself of a plan to insure the destruction of the renegade. It was to bring him to the spot where they stood at once.

Threatening the Indian girl with instant death, by hurling her from the cliff, in case she uttered a warning note, he bade Ruth raise her voice to so high a key that it could not fail to reach the renegade's ears, and so give him a clew to her whereabouts.

For an instant Ruth hesitated to do this. It seemed almost like murder to her.

Then the remembrance of her father, so foully slain, came upon her mind, and she felt an overmastering desire that his death might be avenged.

She hesitated no longer, but raised her voice as though speaking to some one, and in an instant the sounds from below ceased.

This told them that Justin Litch had heard her, and they knew that he would lose no time in hastening toward the summit of the cliffs.

They stood in profound silence, waiting for the moment when they might catch a glimpse of him approaching the spot where they stood.

Without a sound or a motion, the Indian girl stood as erect as a statue. Not a sound escaped her lips. Either she cared not to warn the renegade of the danger to which he was hastening, or else she was fearful that Luke Hawkins would carry out the threat he had made of flinging her over the cliffs.

The scout did not relinquish his hold upon her arm. He held her so that he could make good his word in case she opened her lips with a sound of warning.

In a short time they heard the sound of the renegade's footsteps hastening over the rocks. Nearer and nearer they drew, and at length they were close at hand. A moment more, and his head would appear above the rocks.

Little he thought that he was coming to the doom he so richly deserved.

At last, with a bound, the renegade sprang up the remaining steep ascent, and stood not half a dozen paces from them.

At that instant a cry burst from the lips of Morning Star, which echoed loudly around. It was meant for a warning, but it came too late. Even had Justin Litch understood it, he could not escape the doom to which he had come.

The instant the cry came from the lips of Morning Star, Luke let go his hold upon her arm, and as quick as thought brought his rifle to his shoulder. Another moment, and his finger had pressed the trigger, and the bullet sped forth on its deadly errand.

A loud report rang out, waking the echoes of the cliffs, and mingled with it was a wild, despairing cry from the lips of the renegade, as he toppled over the rocks, his doom sealed forever.

If the bullet had not ended his career, the rough, jagged rocks below finished it.

Robert Lee was avenged.

Harry stretched out his hand toward Morning Star, impelled by a fear that she might seek to throw herself over the cliffs after him. As if divining his purpose, she put back his hand, saying:

"The pale-face need not fear; the Indian girl will not follow her husband. His paths were dark and his heart wicked. He has brought his doom upon his own head. Let him go."

"That's where you're sensible!" exclaimed Luke. "T'ain't any use to grieve for the like of him, much less to throw your life away. He ought to have died a dozen deaths, to pay for what he has done."

"He has gone to the Spirit Land, and so let him rest," said Morning Star. "Now let the pale-faces go to their homes. Morning Star could stop them if she would. By a word she could bring all the warriors of the Miami upon them; but she will not do it. She will show them the way to the foot of the cliffs, and then they shall turn their faces toward their own lodges. Come."

To this none of the party made any objections. On the contrary, they were glad of the protection she would afford them, deep as they were in the enemy's country. So they followed her down the steep descent, and once at the bottom, they parted, after thanking her for the favor she had shown them.

Neither of our friends ever saw her again, but months after they learned that she had become the bride of Springing Panther, the young chief who had sought for her love unsuccessfully in former times.

The storm which had so long threatened cleared away, and they went through the forest toward the settlement, their spirits elated with their triumphs and escapes.

A sharp lookout for danger was kept up by the scout, but nothing occurred to alarm them, and in due time their homes were reached in safety, where a warm welcome was accorded them by those who had sought long and earnestly for a clew to the missing Ruth.

In a short time Ruth and Harry were united, and peace and happiness took up their dwelling with them.

Luke Hawkins was their constant friend, and made their cabin his home whenever he was in the settlement. He still made good his claim to the name of Death-Shadow, and many were the dangers he averted from the homes of the settlers.

[THE END.]

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